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ABSTRACT

Professional preparation of educational administrators is in need of active and productive school district-university cooperation. This paper recommends increased district-university cooperation in (1) recruitment and selection of students for doctoral programs in educational administration; (2) planning, development, and evaluation of preparatory programs; and (3) development of field-related training experiences and instructional approaches. (Author/LLR)

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UNIVERSITY - SCHOOL DISTRICT COOPERATION IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE PREPARATION

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UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL DISTRICT COOPERATION IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE PREPARATION

I am happy to be with you today and to have this opportunity of sharing with you some thoughts about relationships between school districts and universities generally and, more particularly, about how these relationships bear upon the preparation of educational administrators. Let me tell you first how I see school district-university relations as they commonly exist; then I'd like to discuss a few areas in which improved relations are badly needed.

The Current Situation

As I see it -- and of course I'm generalizing; there are undoubtedly many exceptions to this -- but as I see it, the part played by school district leaders in university-school district relationships has typically been a passive one. For example, school functionaries will accept student teachers and interns of various specializations. They'll help these young people if they can, but frequently the kind of help offered is discouraging (especially with administrative interns). Or, school administrators will come to the university campus from time to time for short in-service programs where they sit and are talked at, then dutifully given an opportunity to ask a couple of questions, which <u>are</u> dutifully asked -- and dutifully answered -- and then they are sent back to what is variously called "out there," or "the field," or " the firing line," or simply "hell."

Or, university researchers will be permitted to study the schools, and school personnel will answer questions -- if and when they are asked. This pattern has two variations. One is initiated by the university. A professor or student -- or a team of professors or students -- wants to do some research in order to validate a theory or test an hypothesis. The other variation is initiated by the school district which, for a

variety of reasons, finds itself in some kind of a problem situation -- or approaching some kind of a problem situation -- and needs help from university personnel -- to conduct a survey the school district personnel can't conduct, because they lack either the expertise or the time, or because the Board of Education doesn't trust them to do it themselves, or demands some external legitimation for what it knows the survey team will find. For either variation, however, the pattern is generally the same; school district personnel sit back and answer questions, or let themselves be observed.

And that pretty well describes school district - university relations at present, at least as I observe them. I would suggest that this is not adequate. While these kinds of cooperation are necessary -- and often beneficial -- they are not enough. If universities are going to prepare people to operate effectively in today's schools, they are going to need help from you, and a lot of it. It is no longer sufficient for you to sit back passively and let universities do their thing to you. It is no longer sufficient for you to sit back passively and let universities do their thing to you. It is no longer sufficient to help out by opening your offices as observation posts for interns, or your classrooms as laboratories for researchers. Sure, it's nice of you to do these things and the universities appreciate it. In fact, they are darn lucky to get this kind of cooperation -- and in many areas they don't get this kind of cooperation.

It's instructive to consider for a moment why, in some areas, school districts don't yield willingly to the advances of university people. Why? Because in the past they've been double-crossed. The study really wasn't what they'd originally been told it was; or its conduct was totally disruptive to the on-going educational program; or its unflattering results were leaked without approval of school authorities; or the interns simply got in the way of the person they were shadowing around from lunch room to lavatory.

How might some of these dysfunctions be avoided and more functional working relationships between school districts and universities be developed and maintained? I don't know for sure, but I have one powerful hunch: there is a great need for universities to do much more than simply "use" a school district as a passive and receptive training ground or research laboratory. School district personnel must participate actively in projects that will involve them from before the project begins until after it is finished. That means they must be full partners in planning and designing a research project or an internship experience; they must commit time and talent (not just records, interview responses, and cash) to the actual conduct of a study; they must bear a major responsibility for the education of student teachers or interns assigned to them; and they must be totally involved in the evaluation and follow-up of a project -- in determining how its results are to be measured, in measuring those results, in interpreting and drawing out their implications for needed changes in the schools or the people involved, and in taking positive steps to implement these changes.

What I am suggesting, then, is that if active participation instead of passive receptivity characterized the behavior of school district personnel in projects involving university-school district cooperation, there would be fewer school district personnel who are disenchanted with university projects, there would be more examples across the country of fruitful working relationships between universities and school districts, and there would be many more effective, productive, truly significant projects conducted by universities in cooperation with school districts. The fact that this is not generally the case now, that school districts

continue to serve as passive recipients of university programs and services -- if, indeed, they permit entré to university people at all. This fact may not be blamed primarily on one party or the other; both are about equally at fault -- the school district for not insisting on playing a more active part in the cooperative projects (or not wanting to) and the university for not permiting them to or not inviting them to.

The Problem

But all of this is simply a prelude to what I really want to discuss with you today. Even if you do participate actively in the kind of projects I've been talking about -- the typical cooperative projects between universities and school districts like student teacher and intern programs, in-service education experiences, and research or field surveys -- these kinds of projects by their very nature limit the part you can play in their conduct. Almost by definition, you are the recipients and not the donors of the programs or services. The basic psychology of most of them is that it is you who need help, who need looking at, who need to be taught or studied -- and it is the universities who possess the expertise to help you; to teach you; to study you; to observe, diagnose, and prescribe for your problems.

I would suggest that it's about time the shoe was put on the other foot. It's about time we all admitted openly that universities need help -- that someone needs to observe, diagnose, and prescribe for their problems -- that their personnel need to be taught and their programs studied -- and that it is you, as practicing school men, who possess the expertise to provide these services.

Now, how can you help? What services are needed and how can you provide them? I'll suggest a few, but I'm going to limit myself to the area I know best -- the area of school administration and, more particularly, university preparation programs for educational administrators.

Let me first try to quickly set the problem for you. In a study of "Issues and Problems in Contemproary Educational Administration" a few years ago, Keith Goldhammer and his colleagues interviewed numerous superintendents across the country and found that, to a man, "they felt that both their preparatory programs and the in-service educational opportunities which they have had since entry into administrative posts were far from adequate for preparing them to resolve the problems which daily confront them."[1] Among the reasons for this inadequacy and lack of relevance in administrator preparation programs, Vern Cunningham and Ray Nystrand, in a recent issue of the Educational Administration Quarterly, suggest that the interest and involvement of professors in problems associated with the field have declined, that developments at the federal and state levels and within the private economic sector have presented opportunities to professors which compete with their interests in serving local school systems, and that university reward systems serve as a deterrent to professional concern with problems at the field level, with the result that "many professors have lost part of the reality base which is essential to structure administrator training programs."[2]

To remedy this unhealthy condition, Cunningham and Nystrand emphasize that "the starting point for the development of relevant administrator training must be cooperation between departments of educational administration and the institutions which employ their graduates."[3] But, on the basis of their observations across the country, they conclude that "well-developed cooperative arrangements between colleges and universities preparing administrators and large-city school systems are rare if they exist at all"; and that "a genuine partnership in preparation does not exist."[4] While Cunningham and Nystrand are concerned primarily with large urban school systems, I have found no evidence that the situation is much more encouraging with regard to cooperation in administrative preparation

between universities and smaller school districts in suburban and rural areas.

A couple of years ago, the UCEA central staff conducted a rather comprehensive study designed to produce some guidelines which would help those in universities who are trying to re-structure their preparatory programs in educational administration. This study was directly in line with the mission of our Council. For those of you who don't know UCEA (and I imagine that includes many of you), we are a confederation of 59 of the leading universities in the United States and Canada which have joined together to contribute their collective resources to advance the study of educational administration and to improve the preparation of educational administrators. The basic idea is that these leading universities can make better progress by sharing their resources and working cooperatively than any one of them could by working independently. To stimulate, facilitate, and coordinate these joint efforts, a central staff has been established and its headquarters have been located for the past twelve years on the Ohio State University campus, Ohio State being one of our member universities and being fairly centrally located in terms of the geographic distribution of our membership.

The study to which I referred, then, was to help us provide leadership to our membership in their efforts to up-grade their preparatory offerings. One aspect of this study -- the part I was responsible for -- sought to determine what the recent trends and projected needs in administrative preparation programs are, in the perceptions of school superintendents and university professors. We limited ourselves to the consideration of doctoral programs. We conceptualized these programs as consisting of ten main components -- such as content of the programs, structure of the programs, recruitment and selection of students, evaluation and development of the programs, functions and staffing of departments of educational

administration, instructional approaches utilized, the nature of field-related experiences, student research, requirements for graduation, and the like. For each of these program components, we sought to determine what changes had occurred within the past five years, what the current strengths and weaknesses are, and what changes will likely become desirable within the next five to ten years.

After analyzing all the data, one of the results we came up with was a set of general trends and needs in preparatory programs for school superintendents which seemed to be basic to a number of the specific program components -- trends and needs that seemed typical of administrative preparation in general. One of these major conclusions was the following: "There is a general need for the increased involvement of practicing administrators in several components of preparatory programs for superintendents."[5] And it should be noted that this generalization was derived from the perceptions of both school superintendents and university professors.

O.K., so you can look at Goldhammer's research; you can look at the work of Cunningham and Nystrand; you can look at the results of our UCEA study -- you can look in many places, and you keep coming up with this crying need for cooperation between school districts and universities in the improvement of administrator preparation. The problem exists, and it is a critical one. How can we resolve it? When it comes down to specifics, what kind of joint action is needed? In what particular ways can you help? Let me conclude my remarks today by suggesting a few possible answers to these questions.

Some Recommended Strategies

In our UCEA study of trends and needs in superintendent preparation, there were four or five of the ten program components that we considered in which the need for school district-

university cooperation seemed particularly crucial.

Recuritment and Selection

One preparatory component in which improved university-school district cooperation is needed is the recruitment and selection of students for doctoral programs in educational administration. You are undoubtedly aware that there is a growing movement afoot to expand the base of recruitment for educational administrators so as to include those who have never had experience in the schools, other than as students. At a recent AASA Convention, for example, a panel considered the question, "should superintendents be recruited from the ranks of business?" And increasingly we find enrolled in educational administration doctoral programs young persons recruited directly from Bachelor's and Master's programs in the humanities and the social sciences, from VISTA, from the Peace Corps, and from the Armed Services. You might well ask "how the heck are these people going to get jobs as school administrators?" Well, it's possible in a few states for them to get jobs right now, and I would predict that it will become possible in several more states within the next decade. My own organization is now embarking upon a project which may facilitate this trend. And I personally think it's a healthy trend. There are several reasons why persons who would make excellent school administrators don't become school administrators, and one of these is the requirement that they teach school for a certain number of years before they are eligible for appointment to administrative positions. This scares some of our best leadership talent away, and it's an ironic loss because I don't think we have any evidence to show that ex-teachers are any better at school administration than anyone else.

So I think we can expect more and more to see people coming into administrative preparation programs, and from there into school leadership positions, by non-traditional routes. This will give us a broader leadership pool from which to recruit for school

administration, and it will also lead to a decline in the current crippling practice of robbing our classrooms of their best teachers to fill administrative vacancies.

However, I also believe that a person who has real leadership ability and some professional experience in schools as well is a special kind of person with unique potential to be a successful school administrator (whatever that is). We must carefully look among those now working in our schools to identify recruits for administrative preparation programs -- not because they are great teachers and hence should make great administrators, not because they are lousy teachers and must be kicked upstairs, not because they've given so many years of loyal service and are due for some kind of monetary and status reward -- but because they possess those unique leadership capabilities that are so rare and precious.

Here, then, is where a critical need for university-school district cooperation comes in. How can these persons be identified? You have a far better opportunity to recognize them than do the people on campus. But what are these unique leadership capabilities? How are they expressed? What kind of evidence of their expression does one look for? Answers to these questions must be formulated jointly by school administrators and university professors. Partial answers can be postulated by each party, but adequate answers are impossible without the combined insights of those who have studied and taught leadership, and those who have practiced and observed it. So school district and university personnel together must establish what they are looking for; then it is pretty much up to you who work daily with school people to actually identify it and bring it to the attention of those in the university.

But the need for cooperation doesn't end with recruitment. It carries through to selection as well. Once a group of potential candidates for administrative preparation have been identified, they must be screened, and only the best selected for admission to

the training program. Your cooperation at this stage, of course, applies to prospective students recruited both from within education and from outside the Establishment. I am sure you recognize that selection is becoming an increasingly critical process in our field because of a growing emphasis on quality and a corresponding de-emphasis on quantity. We already have many more persons who are technically qualified to administer schools than we need. So we can afford to be highly selective -- and in light of the increasing difficulty and complexity of your job, we must be highly selective.

But we have a real problem. We are not sure what kinds of criteria we are looking for and -- even when we develop some hunches about them -- we are not sure how to measure the degree to which an individual meets these criteria. For example, are physical courage and endurance as important as intellectual ability? Are certain values more important than others? How important are conflict management skills, or the ability to tolerate ambiguity, or human compassion? And how on earth do you measure these characteristics? University people need all the help they can get in answering questions such as these, and practicing school administrators, in my opinion, are one of the best possible sources of this help.

So university and school district personnel must work together in developing selection criteria and in designing means to measure the degree to which prospective students meet these criteria. And then school administrators must become full partners with university professors in the selection process itself. They must share the tasks of testing, reviewing credentials, interviewing, and making final decisions about who is to be admitted to an administrative preparation program and who isn't. Other professionals excercise some influence over entry into their profession, and you should

have an opportunity to do so as well.

Program Evaluation and Development

A second training component which requires close university-school district cooperation is the whole broad area of the planning, development, and evaluation of preparatory programs. We all recognize and criticize the theory-practice gap in administrative training. School administrators view university professors as too ivory towerish and out of touch with the real problems on the firing line. And university professors view school administrators as too conservative and overly concerned with the trivial and technical nuts and bolts of running a school system. You're both wrong. And for starters we have got to liquidate some of this ignorance about what the other side is interested in. They we can get down to the real job of focusing the most promising insights of the humanities and the social science disciplines upon the most crucial problems that you face.

There is a great readiness for this. In our survey, the superintendents repeatedly said, we believe that there are disciplinary concepts and theories which can really help us, but these were not clearly identified for us in our preparatory programs. And the professors said again and again, we've had enough of the "theory for theory's sake" movement; we're ready now for a "theory for practice's sake" movement.[6] But this mutual readiness has so far just led to a kind of vacuum. School administrators ask, what are the theories that we should be focusing on our problems? And university professors ask, what are the problems we should be focusing our theories upon? And both ask how can we best accomplish this focusing?

Well, you can't answer these questions by remaining isolated from each other in your respective ivory-tower sanctuaries and firing-line trenches. You've got to get together

for the express purpose of answering these questions. A group of practicing school administrators should meet regularly with professors in a university's Department of Educational Administration -- not just to discuss your trials and tribulations (although a university probably has a responsibility to help you with them if it can) but to discuss the university's problems in developing a meaningful and relevant preparatory program for your profession. Every university department of educational administration should have an advisory group of practicing school administrators -- drawn from a variety of positions and locations -- a committee that meets with it regularly to help develop departmental policy and program plans. And this group should not just react to ideas; it should be expected to initiate ideas. And it should do so with respect to the planning of what goes into a program, to the design of ways to incorporate changes into the program, and to the evaluation and interpretation of program changes once they have been implemented. This advisory group, in other words, should not just be a legitimating device for program changes the university wishes to institute; it should have a significant functional responsibility for the changes that are implemented and for their results.

Field-Related Experiences and Instructional Approaches

A third area of administrator preparation requiring cooperation between universities and school districts is the development of field-related training experiences and instructional approaches. This is related to the theory-practice gap I mentioned a few minutes ago. Certain kinds of content and experiences are best presented on campus. Others are more appropriately offered in the field. And then there is a kind of middle-ground where the perspectives of the campus and the field must be carefully integrated. I have already discussed the need for a group of practicing administrators to constantly advise professors on the campus-based experiences -- in answering the questions "what content is of the most worth?" and "how can it best be presented?" So let's jump immediately to those

experiences that take place in the field.

Professors are almost unanimous in their belief that some kind of field-related experience is essential to adequate administrator preparation. They are also almost unanimous in their dissatisfaction with the typical administrative internship, in which the student spends anywhere from a couple of months to a full year following a school administrator around, learning the ropes of the job, and becoming a carbon copy of the man he works with. Despite the general dissatisfaction with this pattern, it will likely continue to be used by a number of universities, and you can play a big part in improving it by fashioning a truly worthwhile experience for the interns that may work with you -- giving them a wide variety of experiences, making them fully responsible and accountable for significant tasks, assisting them in relating what they do with you to what they learn at the university, and working hard to help them improve their skills and overcome their weaknesses.

But the emergent trend in field-related experiences today is to rotate interns among a variety of agencies which are not part of the schools but are crucial to the effectiveness of the schools. For example, an educational administration intern may spend a few weeks in the mayor's office, a couple of weeks with the model cities people, with the city planner's office, with the local NAACP, with the urban coalition, or with any of a variety of other school-relevant agencies. It is in facilitating this kind of rotating internship arrangement that practicing school administrators can play a very important role.

These experiences must be well balanced; they must be pertinent; they must give the intern a broad understanding of the societal forces impacting upon the schools; and they must be devoid of meaningless duplication. On the basis of your experience in school administration, you are probably in a better position than anyone else to help the universities in two important ways in setting up this kind of internship; first, in identifying a series

of intern locations which meet the criteria I just mentioned; and secondly, in making the initial contacts with officials in these agencies and convincing them of the potential and purposes of the internship experience. With this kind of help from you, a university's chances of providing its students with a valuable rotating internship experience will be vastly enhanced.

Now let's look quickly at the area of instructional approaches in administrative preparation. This is the sort of middle-ground I referred to where the perspectives of the campus and of the field must be well blended. During the sixties we witnessed in our field a decline in the use of the traditional lecture-and-textbook approach to instruction and an escalation in the employment of case studies, simulations, and other role-playing mechanisms for training school administrators. These are reality-oriented devices which permit the student to wrestle with actual school problems, but to wrestle with them in the non-threatening context of the university classroom. Now, because they are non-threatening, they are non-real. However, they approach reality and they have the advantage of enabling a student to experiment with different solutions, to try a second time, to determine his own areas of weakness, and to benefit from the advice of his professors and fellow students in improving his decision-making and problem-solving skills -- all without running the risk of damaging an actual school system. He can make his mistakes and learn from them without jeopardizing the education of real kids.

For these instructional approaches to be effective, however, the problems must be real -- and they must be timely. And here is where your contribution is badly needed. A professor cannot -- or should not -- make up a case study or a simulation package. He must go out in the field and get it, or someone in the field must get it for him. Almost every day, you people encounter problematic situations which would be well suited to the case or simulation mode of presentation for training purposes. If you could find time to write some of these

up as case studies or simulation items -- or if you could simply report them to a professor who you know is interested in case or simulation development -- it would be of terrific help to the universities in keeping their instructional materials timely. Or, if you know that a crisis is about to pop in your school district, or a crucial confrontation is scheduled, you might let a professor know and invite him to sit in. His presence might result in a new classic being added to our case files. And hundreds of educational administration students might benefit from responding in the classroom to the problem you had to face in practice. Moreover, the professor might even be of some assistance to you in preparing for and coping with the impending crisis.

There are numerous other areas in which better working relationships are badly needed between school districts and universities if administrative preparation programs are to be improved the way they must be. Consider, for example, the possibility of your swapping jobs with some professors for a while; or of your letting a student have responsibility for implementing and evaluating a major innovation in your school district instead of his writing a typical research dissertation; or of your providing to universities, on a regular basis, an inventory of the most significant problems you must deal with, so that these problems can become foci for both pre-service and in-service programs offered by the universities.

Conclusion

Perhaps I have said enough to demonstrate the two points I set out to make: first, that if we can get over the hang-up that university-school district cooperation is a phenomenon in which the university does something to the school district -- if we can start demonstrating that school personnel can play an active, initiating role instead of a passive, receptive role -- both the university and the school district will derive benefits

from such an arrangement. And secondly, that the professional preparation of educational administrators is an area which is badly in need of this kind of really active and productive school district-university cooperation.

These kinds of relationships don't just happen, of course, They require a good deal of willingness and commitment on the part of both sides. I know that some universities are ready for it. I hope that you, as practicing school administrators, are too. In the field of educational administration you have a special obligation to participate actively in improving preparation for your profession -- because ours is one of the few professional fields I know of in which the professors are not at the same time practitioners. So if the practitioner perspective is to be brought to bear on efforts to improve our preparatory programs -- and it must be -- then you are the ones who have to bring it. Many of our professors have not practiced school administration for more than a decade, and an increasing number have never been school administrators at all -- and never will be. So, you see, our universities need your help badly.

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